The Woman's College of The University of North Carolina LIBRARY



CQ no.148

COLLEGE COLLECTION

AN EXPLANATION OF THE EXISTENCE OF TWELVE PAINTINGS

by

Ann Chipley

168

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of
the Consolidated University of North Carolina
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro 1953

Approved by

Gregory D. Ivy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

							# 1 db .L.							PAGE
INT	RODUC	TION												I
AN I	EXPLA	NATION	OF T	HE E	XIST	ENCE	2							
	OF	TWELVE	PAIN	TING	s .			•		•			•	4
	The Essence Of Art													
	The Pressure Of Environment													
	The Artist's Relation To Environment													
	The Desire To Create A Dynamic Equilibrium													
	Energy													
	Life-movement													
	The Creation Is The Primary Consideration													
	The Paintings													
	Con	clusio	n											
BIBL	IOGRA	APHY												21

INTRODUCTION

Every form of being contains within itself its history; its heritage; its tradition. The tradition of Art is a vital part of the tradition of Man. The two are inseparable, for it is doubtful that Man would exist without Art, and certainly Art would not exist without Man. The potentialities of Art may exist, but until there is an artist to see and to realize these potentialities they will not become a reality. Reality (the meaning the word will carry in this paper) is the fulfillment of the potentialities of life.

Behind every tradition there lies a concept, an idea. No form corresponds completely to this concept for behind every one lies a larger idea.

"Life is present in every stage of a plant's growth and it is always the same life, though it is more fully expressed in the developed tree than in the first push of the blade."

The tradition of Man and Art is the activity of Man's struggle to realize the fulfillment of the potentialities of life.

It is by participating in the harmonious, self-contained world of Art that he may experience this fulfillment.

Traditions usually follow a logical sequence of development. There seems to be a controlling factor in the development of traditions just as physical growth develops according

G. T. Garratt, Legacy of India, 1937, p. 256.

to natural law. The process of the transformation of ideas or concepts into the objectivity of the art form (artistic creation) always obeys an inward necessity and represents a rational process; that is, it follows a reasonable sequential order of growth which could not be reversed. Although it is not a conscious awareness, an artist is bound to this "inward necessity" because the value of his work is dependent upon whether or not it is creative.

The form of an artist's work is influenced by his conceptions of his environment and his relationship with the environment, and his conception of his work as a whole, and of the individual paintings. Knowing within himself that the value of his work is dependent upon whether or not the work is creative, an artists conception of his work depends upon a deep understanding of what artistic creation means, an understanding of the source of the concepts or ideas which he tries to realize in his work, and an understanding of what it is that he creates.

To this painter one of the most obvious manifestations of life is movement. Much of the work which this paper accompanies has its immediate source in the desire to understand and realize this movement which is so basic to life, and in the desire to understand the tension which is generated by the energy of the movement. Since movement and tension

are so important in the paintings, much of the discussion of the paintings will be concerned with these two aspects of life as constituent elements in the paintings.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE EXISTENCE OF TWELVE PAINTINGS

The Essence of Art

An artist is a person whose total needs are by no means supplied by practical, physical existence. To him the needs and desires of that part of existence which we call fantasy and imagination are as integral a part of him as are his physical and practical needs. The essence of art will be found neither in supplying the needs of the practical objective world nor in the expression of philosophical or religious ideas; nor yet in the world of pure fantasy. Art is essentially the creation of a self-contained world. It resolves the contradiction of man's destiny to be born, exist, die, and his desire to transcend this destiny; and it also resolves the contradictions of practicality and fantasy. Through the resolution of these contradictions a totality is formed and the individual sees some aspect of universal truth.

Man is part of and surrounded by birth, existence, dying. Everything we come in contact with in the material world follows this cycle. Things in nature, man, and the products of man (other than art) all have this common denominator; the deviation from the common is that they all fulfill this cycle in different ways. However, a painting or any other art form comes into existence and once it exists it

projects itself beyond the boundaries which man, animal, vegetable, or any other form of existence are bound to.

This projection beyond "bounded" existence is the manner in which the totality of life is realized, for art contains its potentialities and the realization of these potentialities.

Man realizes that the "circle" is not the whole of life; that a great part of life lies outside this cycle. The very fact that he is equipped with imagination is proof of this. Through the creative imagination we know that there is a knowledge and realization of life which we cannot grasp through the intellect and senses alone; nor is it grasped only through intuition. Because of this awareness of the largeness of life, there is always with man the desire to transcend himself, to live the whole of life (in a sense it is what he is not that makes man what he is). It is through art that he finds satisfaction of this desire.

The Pressure Of Environment

Whatever else art may be as a cultural product, it is primarily the expression of a person who is concerned with the creation of a self-contained, independent existence.

Economic, social, and natural influences have an effect upon broad movements of thought and opinion in every epoch. Art

has necessary relations with politics, with religion, and with all other modes of reacting to our human destiny; but as a manner of "reaction" it is distinct. The work of art cannot, and makes no attempt to, escape the force of such ambient intangible influences as the philosophies and theologies of the period and it is influenced and affected by the material conditions of existence, but as a source of knowledge it is at once its own reality and its own end. For, there comes a time in the evolution of art in which the very force of the social and natural influences become pressures which result in the release from the stagnation of this inclosure into the freshness and vitality of creative originality. It is the very pressure from these influences which effects the artist, and it is this pressure which determines the form of his work. All through history each new expressive form has been the result of the response or reaction of some painter or group of painters to these external forces. Each period is the accumulation of the events concerned with such a response. This usually happens with art first responding to the external forces and then developing into art responding to art.

The Artist's Relation to Environment

Since it is at one and the same time an integral part of society and its own reality and its own source of knowledge,

apparently the vitality of art is dependent upon the ability of the artist to create and maintain a delicate balance between sensibility and the pressures upon his intellect and emotions which he receives from the social and natural element in which he exists. This would mean that the environment and experience of the artist are inseparable from the created object. Although a painting is first presented to the eye, the material it presents cannot be gathered by the eye alone. All perception is a constructive process; an effort of integrating lifelong train of memories, associations, and experiences. Since the artist desires the possession of all of life he cannot separate himself from livingness anywhere where livingness is. He is not only aware of his society as immediate existence, but is also aware of the fact that it is only one manifestation of a continuous process. In order that he might see his society as a part of a totality, the artist must live in separateness and non-separateness at the same time.

The artist not only sees his society as an entity which is inseparable from each individual (that the individual can realize his potentialities only through the culture in which he participates), but he also sees that the total existence of mankind is an entity from which no individual person or society is separable. Therefore, the artist can live in

separateness only if he lives just as completely in nonseparateness. He must be continually absorbing and perceiving things in the immediate locality while retaining a conception of the totality. The artist must create and maintain a balance between living in non-separateness and separateness.

This necessity for living in separateness and nonseparateness at the same time is only one instance of the
fact that artists are always seeking ways to create and sustain a balance or a resolution of contradictions. The visual
image itself is the result of a process of organization, and
formation; a bringing together of diverse and isolated elements
into a coherent whole.

The Desire To Create A Dynamic Equilibrium

This painter is continually amazed at the immensity, the diversity and the complexity of the whole process of living. The motion and activity - the vitality, the energy - the preoccupation with the structure and function of energy - the awareness that things are not merely planes, but composites of many things - the interrelationships of the individuals to each other and to the world, and the world to the universe - and going further, the relationship of the individual to the universe; and, at the core of it all is the desire for unity, direction, purpose. This desire for unity, direction, purpose, leads to an effort to create a dynamic

equilibrium between the tensions created by the diversity and activity. The stronger the tension created by the contradicting forces pulling in different directions, the more dynamic is the effort to create an equilibrium; this equilibrium being an organic interconnection, not a stagnation.

A dynamic equilibrium cannot be obtained by thinking and seeing in terms of static isolated things which have no plastic relationship to each other, for this is thinking and seeing in terms of stagnant inertia which cannot and will not keep up with the dynamic order which is a necessary element in man's life, and in the life of a painting. Thinking in terms of isolationism and complete individualism is incongruous with the actuality of interrelationship and integration which is necessary in the existing state of things.

"We talk of a new, shrunken, interdependent, world in the primitive smoke-signals of 'nationality', 'race', and 'sovereignity'...We attempt of visualize the eventfulness of a universe that is an electro-dynamic plenum in the representational cliches evolved at a time when statically conceived, insoluble 'objects' were regarded as occupying positions in an empty and absolute 'space'."2

However, existence is not an isolated experience composed of fragments. The only parts which hwe value are those which contain the possibilities of a whole. The relation of particular instances to the whole process of creation cannot be expressed by recording isolated facts for isolated fragments

² Gyorgy Kepes, The Language of Vision, 1947, p. 9.

cannot exist in a process concerned with harmony and completeness. What is necessary to the whole is the movement of
weaving the parts into a completeness that exists, not in
isolation, but as an integrated whole concerned and moving
with the total movement toward harmony. This "total movement"
is creation; it is the central concern of life and of art.

It has already been stated that man cannot live in terms of static isolated existence. He cannot live in chaos either in his own mental and physical makeup, nor in his natural environment. In the actual process of living, we experience differences and similarities, and try to bring the differences into a coherent statement by relating them through the similarities. The painter, by integrating contradicting or opposing forces, creates a symbolic inage of order which he accepts as the actual forming of his experiences into a harmony. The spectator also participates in the forming of order by perceiving a whole composed of interrelating forces.

Energy

In a painting each form generates its own particular thrust of energy, and in forming his image of order the painter works with these energetic thrusts and the tension which they create. Some forms of energy merge with each other, becoming parts of one another; like the action of waves of water coming from different directions. Other forms of energy bang against

each other or else, when they do not hit but remain in direct opposition to each other, create a sustained tension through the action of their resistance, much like the character of the energy generated by the process of gravitation between two planets. Another result of energetic thrusts is the force of cohesion which binds inert weight to plastic rising forces when they are in direct opposition to one another. However great the pull of gravity may be, the vital forces excape and rise, much the same as the suspension which is created when an object is falling and its fall is broken by a net. In the process of the effort of the eye and mind to perceive the essential character of the contradictions and similarities, and form them into a coherent concrete experience, the painting itself becomes an object of movement, generating its own life movement through the process of harmonizing oppositions.

Life Movement

Most of the paintings which this thesis accompanies are concerned with this 'life movement' and the tensions and harmonies inherent in it.

Perhaps <u>life</u> is one of the most important words in an artist's vocabulary. Not only the actual process of living, but the life which manifests itself in the paintings. The writer believes that somewhere behind every art form there is a very basic delight in the very fact of existence and this is

an important factor in the life of an artist. It is a sort of exultation in being a part of the protean movement of life. This joy may have no manifestation other than (if the work is adequate) a sense of fulfillment; the possession of an unverbal knowledge that could be gained in no other part of life. The artist knows that this knowledge is worth whatever he went through to obtain it. In a sense, art crystalizes that basic moving reality of life that makes it real and vital and not a static existence in a void. Each painting is a new crystalization and, the reason for the existence of each painting is the same as the reason for the existence of art. Above all, a painting is the manifestation of the fact that an artist is a human being living in a world of objects, people, ideas, intellect, senses, emotions. An artist is a person who thinks and acts in such a way that were every opportunity for artistic creation absent from existence, the process of living would be an acute misery.

In the work which this paper accompanies, each painting was not thought of as just a means to an end, but as a reality in itself. It is true that one painting may lead to another; that some thoughts or knowledge brought into existence in one painting may become a more complete realization in another, but rather than just steps toward something, each was created as a completeness in itself; although it is now part of a larger reality ... the whole process of creation.

The Creation Is The Primary Consideration

In speaking of the paintings, it is undesirable for the writer to systematically go through an explanation of the actual process of creating a painting. It is only necessary to give the reader the painter's conception of a painting as a creation. In going through this explanation there is no attempt to tell the reader "what to look for in the paintings". Although a painting may be a conception of perception, it is not considered a vehicle for relating ideas or knowledge to the spectator. The spectator is a secondary consideration. primary concern is the painting itself. Each one is done to fulfill a wish or need of the painter; however, she remains apart from the painting in that it is considered a "living" thing which demands its own life and completeness. The primary concern is in supplying the things which the painting demands. The whole process is a reciprocal action, with the complete attention being concentrated in and atuned to the needs of the painting. Thus the technique is dependent upon the needs of the painting; the form of the composition is a result of the needs of the painting. The materials are never used as playthings, going from one technique to another merely for amusement or excitement. As soon as the work begins taking form it begins demanding the things which will make it complete; it demands its own life. It has already been mentioned that a sense of

fulfillment seems to be at the core of every art form, and although it is a resultant function it is this that the painter demands from the painting.

The process of painting is characterized by impulse in that it involves a process of receiving and perceiving sensation spontaneously, but just as important as the impulsive or spontaneous quality is the power of the mind to direct and control the impulses so that the work becomes a meaningful, coherent whole. Painting is neither completely instinctive, or impulsive, nor is it completely intellectual. It is the result of the ordering of all the human psychological and physical energies into an intrinsically balanced and interworking relationship of these energies.

The Paintings

Most of the paintings discussed in this paper began simply with the painter's attention being caught by something, with this attention developing into an awareness nearing fascination. There is a conscious effort to grasp the nature and cause of this concentrated attention. This 'conscious effort' usually leads to many "unknowns" which are later realized to a "knowledge" in the paintings. The paintings which are titled derive their titles from the thing which evokes this awareness; such as in the one called "Sea Motion".

This painting is one of the earliest of the "thesis

paintings". It is only one of many paintings concerned with movement, for whatever else they may come from, most of these paintings come from a realization that movement is the most obvious and true manifestation of life. To this painter the rhythmic, apparently self-moving, motion of the sea is very beautiful. Perhaps it seems to be a manifestation of a universal pulsation. It is impossible to designate the exact nature of the perception. It is only possible to speak of "universals"now, after the painting is finished. While looking at the sea there is only an awareness of the beauty of its motion. The painting is an attempt to grasp and actually experience this same sort of movement. For the painter this is accomplished through the movement which the eye and mind experience in following the movement of color and form. "Sea Motion" is an effort to realize a rhythmic movement corresponding to that of the sea by varying the width and directional flow of the moving color forms, until there is actually a wish to become a part of the movement.

It may be unusual and perhaps undesirable to some people to accept the words of another person as satisfactory when speaking of one's own work. However, there is a passage in Language of Vision by Gyorgy Kepes, which is much more pertinent than anything the writer could say about the idea behind the painting which will be talked about next. In the

passage emphasis is given to the tendence of some contemporary painters to "throw away all conscious control", and to their reliance upon "sheer chance happenings". The tendencey to 'throw away all conscious control' is not agreeable to this painter. The reason for quoting this passage is its interpretation of the forms expressing the dynamic rhythm which is intrinsic in organic growth.

"Contemporary artists, revolting against fetters of static concept...invent techniques that have the fewest obstacles to the free flow of organic formation. It is natural that these automatic expressions resemble the biomorphic realms of nature. They have the same order as the visible forms of mutations, transformations, the perpetual asymmetric rhythm of the processes not yet fossilized in terms of things. Plastic thinking, thinking with the senses, stated the desires and the will of men opposed to machine control.

Having achieved the scientific mastery of a new vast territory of nature and its ordering into a one sided technological dimension, man was searching for renewed contact with the pulsation of the dynamic forces of nature processes. He recognized that the scientific technological processes needed to be revaluated in biological dimensions. Instead of the old fixed point of perspective, he developed, to meet his need, the perspective of growth instead of static order, the dynamic rhythm. The artist rediscovered nature. But he turned away from the naturalistic representation of the forms of the trees, flowers, and animals, and took as his new subject-matter the visible processes of growth.*3

The painting called "Growth" is an effort to understand this same perpetual rhythm which is a basic element in nature. The main concern was the movement of a form as it progresses from its origin, which contains its potentialities, to its completion, which is another form but still retains its original

³ Kepes, Op. cit., p.194.

qualities. Painting No. 7 followed "Growth", and is still concerned with this idea; however, there is more attention given to the interrelationship of forms.

The painting called "Integration" had its beginning in the desire to work with the problem of integrating contradictions and the kind of movement and tension inherent in a process of integration. There is a much greater interest in working with movement through implied three dimensional space here, than in "Sea Motion", where the movement is more vertical-horizonta. The space is not very deep in "Integration", nor are the contradictions very strong, thus the tension and movement forms not spectacular. Here the interest lay in the motivating power of color as moving-color as well as the tension between forms.

The strain of the pull of energy which is created by forces pulling in different directions can result in the destruction of the wholeness and unity of a thing, whether it be a painting or some other form of existence. There must be a stronger element which can enfold the diversity and direct the energies so that their relationship is resolved, making the creation of a completeness possible. This completeness is made up of diversity and contradictions which are contained and controlled. Energy and diversity are vital forces of life, but unless they are held and molded to a whole then they can destroy as well as create.

This encompassing whole is formed by the interweaving and interrelationship of the parts, and this interweaving process must be controlled by even another, more stable element. It would seem, perhaps, that this "more stable element" would have to be the result of the merging of the other conflicting elements, such as, in the case of "Integration", if the conflicts between red and green had been resolved by an overall "browness". However, the result here would only be brown acting as a ground upon which the red and green carried out their diverse activities. What is needed is a completely different element whose character is so powerful and yet true and stable, that it does not submerge, but controls and directs the action between red and green. Such is the essence of white in "Integration".

It has already been stated that although each painting is a reality in itself, in that it has its own life movement of realizing potentialities, it often happens that the know-ledge brought into existence in one painting may become a more complete realization in another. This is what happens in No. 8.

No. 8 was painted immediately after "Integration" and is still concerned with color movement. Each individual color form is thought of as having its own direction of movement and should provoke an experience of moving at different rates of speed and rhythm. Here again, the power

of the thrusts are restrained. Restraint is an important element in the process of integration, but unless it is used carefully, it can cause an undesirable monotony, by the very fact of its suppressing the vitality of movement.

Conclusion

Man's knowledge (intellectual and intuitive) essentially begins with perception. He knows that as he exists in the present he is a culmination of all that has happened before him. Because he is aware of the continuity in tradition, he is aware that he is also a part of the future. However, he also knows that he is part of the cycle of birth, existence. dying. Since knowledge does begin with perception, and since the existence of his senses is limited, he has a desire to transcend himself and go beyond this boundary. Just as he is aware that he is in the present a crystalization of life as it moves through time-space, and knows that the life-movement will go beyond his physical existence, he desires to crystalize the whole of life into the concrete experience of the "present". Just as he is a culmination of part of a whole, art is a crystalization of ideas or abstract thought (which is unlimited) and practical existence, so that a completeness is created from the contradicting forces of life. This does not mean that art is a non-moving absolute, for one of the greatest concerns in a painting or any other art form is movement. Art is not

concerned with static absolutes. It is concerned with the moving reality of life, and consequently the moving reality of art.

"Reality" means fulfillment. A thing is fulfilled when it lacks nothing, all potentialities have been developed to their fullest degree, it lives completely. A thing can only be fulfilled by a process of fulfillment, and this "process of fulfillment" is as important to the totality as the completeness which is the totality.

It is impossible for a painter to separate himself from life or his work, look at it completely objectively, and say THIS is what it means. There is no "pure meaning" to life and art. They are both processes in which the complete human being is involved and it is not possible to "explain" the human being in such a way. It is possible that words and painting supplement each other as human expression; however, they remain as distinct and separate modes of fulfilling human needs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- Garratt, G. T., The Legacy of India, Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1949.
- Kandinsky, Wassily, On The Spiritual in Art, New York City: Solomon R, Guggenheim Foundation, 1946.
- Kepes, Gyorgy, Language of Vision, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949.
- Read, Herbert, Art and Society, New York City: Pantheon Books Inc., 1945.